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ABSTRACT

Exploring Ethnic Food Authenticity in the U.S.: Ethnicity and Authenticity as Tools of Consumerism

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Dining in ethnic restaurants is a common practice of eating in American society. It is often taken as granted that the restaurant's ethnicity is represented by the food's authenticity of that culture. However, both the ethnicity and authenticity here are of complexities related to consumption. This paper uses examples of a Chinese restaurant and a Japanese restaurant in Midwest region to unravel that the practice of eating in an ethnic restaurant is a form of consuming cultural value produced in ethnic restaurant. The revealed social class distinction of eating ethnic food is a reflection of how cultural value being produced and consumed by people with certain cultural capital. However, the embedded ethnicity of ethnic restaurant and the pursuit of authenticity from consumers encompass a larger cultural force driven by consumerism.